

Pluralism in Religion Education: a feminist perspective

by
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ABSTRACT

The premise throughout this thesis is that religious education at state schools has hopelessly failed.

Teachers are generally apathetic and pupils disinterested and bored by a repetitive content which, for the most part, is a duplication of what happens in Sunday school.

Christian National education, the dominant ethos and philosophy underlying educational methodology, denies the plurality of the South African society and the plurality within Christianity itself. Calvinism is blithely promoted as normative Christianity while the existence of religions such as African Traditional Religion is denied.

The challenge of pluralism in religion education is underlined, in this work, by a feminist analysis which derives from a personal experience.

Any black woman of faith experiences a triple oppression it is held. To this end, the effects of racism, sexism and patriarchy is addressed with the view to contribute towards the transformation of the state of both education and religion in the South African context.

The argument throughout is that a religion education in schools, which is going to reflect the diversity of our society, has to include in its definition of pluralism, the category of gender.

An overview of the state of religion in education serves as an introduction while plurality and the role of the state is defined in chapter one.

The point that gender, as a category of plurality, must be consciously included in its definition, if it aims to restore the full humanity of those who have been dispossessed, is promoted.

Chapter two focuses on the position of women within religion which has hitherto been a negative one and chapter three shortly attempts to clarify the inherent definitional problem of **Religion Education** and argues for a recognition and position of African Traditional Religion in the school syllabus.

Chapter four focuses on the very important question of language since it is language that constructs our heritage.

The symbolic appeals language evokes is further considered and critiqued. The point that masculine language and imagery has to be revised in any pursuit of a just and acceptable religion education is further argued and the implications thereof, set out.

Religious texts are appropriated from a feminist perspective in chapter five and traditional theology challenged.

Examples as to how to read into the text and to read behind the text, in order to rediscover women's lost history is given. Texts which are common to the Abrahamic religions are chosen for its accessibility and immediate relevance.

I think that it is possible for us, while holding that our own convictions are true and right, to recognize that, in some measure, all the higher religions are also revelations of what is true and right. They also come from God, and each presents some facet of God's truth.

(Arnold Toynbee in *Race* 1983:72)

INTRODUCTION

Stating the problem

As a student and teacher of religion, I have become acutely aware of the shortcomings of our present South African approach to the subject.

The school syllabus has one particular religious bias which marginalizes all persons belonging to other religious persuasions. The present approach in our schools is rather sterile and does nothing to develop moral education or individual growth towards responsibility and tolerance.

Religious education is being presented as religious instruction which describes only the Christian faith. This is unacceptable if one considers that the state is funding such instruction which should be the duty of parents and religious communities or institutions.

The state should, instead, ensure an education in tolerance and understanding of the various sources of spiritual and moral fibre which forms the connecting weave in this rich and greatly diverse country.

The problem is compounded at college level where students, our teachers in training, are not adequately prepared to teach in a multi-religious society.

The present first and second year curriculum, in fact, merely repeats what has been done in standards eight and ten respectively.

Whilst the efforts of individual teachers who strive towards a pluralistic approach in their teaching methods need to be acknowledged, not much headway is being made to rectify the situation which is strongly being controlled by the state.

Third year students, especially, need to pass the external state exam in order to qualify as teachers. Those ordained ministers of (the Christian) religion who have been employed as teachers also have vested interests in promoting the present syllabus. The efforts and voices of those who have spoken out against the inequalities and bias of the syllabus can however not be denied.

Religion at schools

Given the history of colonisation and its accompanying missionary activity, one could argue the point that particular communities or regions are religiously exclusive. This phenomenon would hold true for religions other than Christianity too, and would probably determine whether schools in such regions open assemblies with prayers or readings from the Bible, Quran or other sacred texts.

This should however not deter from the fact that children need to be informed about other religions. Hence, a strong differentiation should be made between a school's religious tradition and religion education.

I cannot pretend to know how schools in general will overcome the problem of religious bias in favour of religious neutrality but I will certainly argue for an unbiased curriculum in religion education which ascribes to the fundamental principles of a social science and to education principles.

Any school that screens new pupils on the basis of their religious beliefs cannot claim neutrality. But then again, what about other school entrance tests; are they not all practices that infringe on the rights of the child?

Principals could argue that they have the right and a duty to ensure a continued tradition or ethos, be it acceptable or not to those outside the immediate parameters of the school environment.

Whilst school principals have the right to choose whether schools are to be single sex or integrated schools, they have no right to deny information, no matter what the religious allegiance of the school is. Children have the right to be prepared for responsible citizenship that encompasses tolerance and respect for others and other cultures or traditions.

Alexander Coutts (1992:78) attempts to address the challenges of a multi-cultural education by asserting that:

It is anticipated that each multi-cultural school will have a predominant religious base. The majority of South African schools will probably be predominantly Christian.

For their schools, a curriculum focused on Christianity until standard five (grade seven) is suggested, with an optional multi-cultural and multifaith approach thereafter. Parents should have the right to withdraw their children from these studies. With communities such as the Moslem, Islam would be

taught in place of Christianity, with the same optional multi-faith study pursued in the senior years.

This type of parallel teaching appears to lack the essential elements which multi-cultural education embraces. The proponents of multi-cultural education, and indeed Coutt's himself, aim for a public education which promotes nation-building while cultural and religious diversity will be respected and will be treated as enrichment for all.

Coutts' proposal for a religious education programme does not, in fact, suggest anything different to the present norm at schools. What he does in fact promote, is a single religion education with optional parallel, multi-faith teaching.

This creates a form of Religious Apartheid which, I remember, made me very uncomfortable as a child and alienated me from my close Muslim friends. We jointly partook of all that was done in the class but when it came to religious education (instruction), we had to physically experience the difference by being separated from each other.

I still remember the apprehension I felt, as I expected us to share about each others faiths too. In retrospect, I can now express that, as susceptible children, we were denied an education which could possibly have made all the difference in this country today.

Imagine what a painless exercise South Africa's transition to a more inclusive society

could have been if this generation of adults were raised on a diet of tolerance and mutual respect for each others differences.

Schools should totally transform their religion education syllabus when opting for a multi-cultural approach in order to avoid the perpetuation of separate development on a different level.

Arguments for the inclusion of Religion education

Derek Webster, one other supporter of the inclusion of religion education in the curriculum, sets out four distinctive features of religion education which he argues, will not be covered by other areas of study, should religion education be omitted from the curriculum.

The features he sets out are as follows:

The first distinctive feature of religious education is its understanding of concepts which are formally religious and which interrelate with each other.

The various religions have theologies which offer believers means of reflection and a language to convey faith. Central to theologies are concepts, e.g. holiness, sin, righteousness. Concepts link with each other to elaborate positions or teachings which become doctrines. Doctrines relate to each other, often in very complex ways so that faith may be systematised. It is then part of the teacher's task to explain terminology and to delineate doctrines.

This amounts to clarifying the patterning of ideas in religious faiths.

The second distinctive feature of religious education concerns an understanding of the reasons supporting or disproving religious beliefs. The criteria by which evidence is weighed is analyzed and the procedures used in reaching conclusions are judged. There is an investigation of the methods used in distinguishing between both beliefs and faith systems. A teacher then is involved in the assessment and evaluation of argumentation in religion.

A third feature is the apprehension of the ambiguity of religious language. Within religions there is a rich tradition of myth and a many-layered understanding of symbol; there is poetry, paradox, riddle and mystery. All are used to prompt insight. Achieving this often involves language being used in special ways. Statements are not always descriptive in accustomed ways nor are predicates applicable in literal senses. So teachers illuminate the logical peculiarities, the parabolic nature and the irreducibly paradoxical status of religious language.

The final distinctive feature is an understanding of religious experience. Those who espouse religions claim particular experiences. Often these are shared and bind believers into communities. Some would say that the experiential side is so fundamental that it integrates and legitimises the other three features. Teachers need to foster an awareness of the religious dimension of experience so that their pupils can perceive this dynamic in the lives of believers (Webster 1988:55-56).

Ninian Smart (1991: 10) furthermore argues for a rounded view in the teaching of religion and holds that even though the contents of the scriptures are important, religions need to be seen in a full living context.

He proffers the following elements to be included in that context:-

- (1) doctrines (e.g., the Trinity, the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence);
- (2) the sacred narratives or myths of the tradition (Christian 'salvation-history', the story of the Buddha Gautama);
- (3) the ethical and/or legal teachings (as in the Torah, the Shari'a, the Sermon on the Mount, etc.);
- (4) the ritual and practical side of a religion (the Mass, daily Muslim pray, Buddhist prescriptions and practices of meditation);
- (5) the experiential and emotional side of a religion (the nature of devotion to Christ, Paul's religious conversion, the Buddha's enlightenment, and actions to attain nirvana); and
- (6) the social institutions in which a religion is embodied and the social relations in which it is embedded (the organization and role of the Church of Scotland, the Sangha in Sri Lanka, etc.).

Reference is made to the Swedish development, in the teaching about religion, by Sten Rodhe (1991:84-93) who wishes to promote it as a universal model for the teaching of religion.

The model is presented in point form, of which I choose to extract the following core ideas:

- (a) Religion education should be a teaching of religions, not of one particular religion.
- (b) Religion education should be teaching about religions, not religious instruction.
- (c) Religion education should be descriptive, it should not give religious experience.
- (d) Religion education should deal mainly with living world religions, not with ancient religions or with the origins of religion.
- (e) Religion education should deal with existential questions, not with curiosities.
- (f) The goal of religion education should be to bring learners into living dialogue with religions, not to inform about separate facts.
- (g) Teaching should be drawn from primary sources, not on subjective evaluations.
- (h) Religion education should be a separate subject like all other subjects
- (i) All pupils should be compelled to do religion education throughout their school career.
- (j) Religion education should be complementary to and supplemented by the teaching of religion in the various faith communities and not rival it.
- (k) Religion education at school should set the basis for tolerance of religious pluralism.

Conclusion

Being presented with the aforementioned research which does much to support the argument for a multi-religious approach which is a true reflection of the actual

situation encountered in the 'New South African' classroom, there should not be any envisaged resistance to Rodhe's point that all pupils be compelled to do religion education throughout their school career; since the model promotes inclusivity and a general respect for religious differences.

The overriding problem we face, however, is a very large teacher community that has been raised on a particular brand of fundamental pedagogics that has not been educationally functional. It has served the ideology of white afrikaner nationalists, and thus inculcated what the state understands the Bible to be. It has fostered a diet of authoritarianism, racism, sexism, religious intolerance, -to name but a few of it's spinoffs.

Christian National Education has not just created problems for persons of colour, but for women too, as it is rooted in patriarchalism. This powerful weapon (fundamental pedagogics) which Christian National Education has so successfully used to divide people, will seriously have to be subverted in any attempts to address the educational injustices that have prevailed for so long.

A total change of curriculum is needed to redress the situation; but this will have to be preempted by a change in national attitude and a new constitution which is going to guarantee and promote these ideals.

CHAPTER ONE

RELIGION EDUCATION IN A PLURAL SOCIETY

Religion Education and the State

It has often been said that education is the handmaiden of the state. Past and present political events throughout the world attest to this.

Professor Christo Lombard at the University of Namibia informed us at the conference on Religious Education held at the University of the Western Cape in September 1991 that Namibians had nine months within which to break from the South African syllabus, the moment Namibia gained its independence. Education had to reflect the ideology of the new dispensation that promoted a pluralistic, democratic approach which represented the aspirations of all Namibians and not just that of an elitist minority. Religion education thus needed to play a role in transforming the once fragmented society by reflecting the plurality that exists in a manner which promoted national unity.

It is needless to say that a syllabus implemented with such haste has experienced certain hitches; one of the most important being an ill-prepared teaching force that had "foreign" content imposed on them without much consultation and input from their side and without the necessary text-book back-up.

In South Africa we run the risk of experiencing a similar scenario.

Significant political parties like the African National Congress which has since become the ruling party have assured us that a new democratic constitution is not going to favour any particular religious position.

Viewed pragmatically then, things will have to change to reflect our plural society.

Our educators need to read the writings on the wall and prepare now to avoid a painful transition; they need to choose whether they are going to become facilitators of that change or whether they are going to become its victims.

Defining Religious Pluralism

Pluralism implies recognition and maintenance of the right of cultural groups to retain their cultures and institutions virtually intact, while sharing a common political system and economy in a shared territory. The identity and distinctiveness of cultural groups is thus respected. (Coutts:98)

The pluralistic hypothesis is that religions provide different valid but culturally conditioned responses to a transcendent reality, and offer ways of transcending self and achieving a limitlessly better state centred on that

reality. Thus no one tradition possesses a set of absolute and exclusive truths, while all others are delusory and ineffective for salvation. All will, or at least can be, saved by adhering to their own traditions, which purvey differing, but authentic, responses to the ultimately real. All can know the truth and attain salvation in their own traditions; so believers no longer have to wonder why their God leaves the majority of creatures in mortal error (Ward 1990 1-2).

Gavin D'Costa (1986:18) identifies the three dominant paradigms underlying the different Christian attitudes to other religions as being exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism.

Exclusivism basically confines salvation to Christianity thus excluding other religious traditions from the realm of salvation. It's best representative being the work of Hendrik Kraemer.

While inclusivism, with Karl Rahner being it's chief proponent, promotes salvation as not only being confined to Christians, but is available to all through Jesus' atonement of sins. The latter is viewed by others, as being an attempt to accommodate new situations without changing fundamental presuppositions.

The third paradigm pluralism, advocates all major religious traditions as being different, authentic contexts of salvation.

John Hick (1985:34), the foremost proponent of pluralism, contends that there is a plurality of ways of salvation or a plurality of divine revelations which ensure a plurality of forms of saving human response.

He deals with the problem of naming the Deity or God, a concept absent in Buddhist theology, by making reference to the Real.

He therefore believes that people can promote the authenticity of their own belief without denying the authenticity of other beliefs. And regards these beliefs as alternative soteriological ways along which different believers can find salvation (Hick 1985:36-37).

Hick furthermore cautions us against using particular names and prefers to use a term (the Real) which is consonant with all faiths, since divine Reality exceeds the reach of our earthly speech and thought, and cannot be confined to human concepts. This particular theme is imperative in the way we view divine Reality; an argument I wish to extend in a later feminist analysis of the problem.

Ward (1990:2) expresses the sentiment that all truth - claims are exclusive as

It immediately follows that, where any truth- claim is made, it is logically possible to make another truth- claim which the first claim excludes. It is logically impossible for all truth- claims to be compatible. So it is possible for religious traditions to contain incompatible truth- claims, claims which exclude one another.

How does Hick deal with incompatible truth-claims which often causes an impasse in religious dialogue?

Hick (1985:47-49), himself a Christian, deals with the problem of absolute claims by holding that "one's religious commitment is usually a matter of 'religious ethnicity' rather than of deliberate comparative judgement and choice."

He points out that in Hinduism there is a general tolerance of other ways, often however combined with the assumption that sooner or later everyone in his or her time- and if not in the present life then in other- will come to the fullness of the Vedic understanding; while in the Hebrew tradition it is held that the Jews are God's 'chosen people', partners in a special covenant, so that they may be God's means of revelation to all humanity.

In the Buddhist tradition it is similarly held that the true appreciation of our human situation occurs most clearly and effectively in the teachings of Gautama Buddha and that the Dharma is the full and saving truth, uniquely clear, effective and final among the illuminations and revelations of the world; while in Islam there is the firm belief that Muhammad was 'the seal of the prophets' and that through the Qur'an, God has revealed to humankind the true religion, taking up into itself and fulfilling all previous revelations.

And in the Christian tradition there is a powerful inbuilt basis for the sense of the unique superiority of the Christian faith in the doctrine that Jesus Christ, the founder and focus of the religion, was God incarnate, and to this effect, all other religions are seen as mere human creations.

Hick considers the sense of superiority of one's own religious tradition as an inevitable feature of human life which should however not inhibit the spiritual travel into other religious worlds.

Lonnie Kliever (1992:117) however, refers to John Hick and others as 'blithe pluralists', arguing that their political and ecclesiastical pluraformity is not pluralism. Pluralism, he asserts, assumes no overarching unity or loyalty to an ultimate Real or God. Pluralism in his analysis is "the existence of multiple frames of reference, each with its own scheme of understanding and criteria of rationality" (ibid).

He further views pluralism as a co-existence of comparable and competing positions which are irreconcilable; and a recognition that different people occupy irreducibly different worlds.

Unlike other pluralists he chooses not to accommodate absolute religious and moral claims. To this end he holds that pluralism requires a legitimate principle that transcends all systems of thought, without becoming a system within itself.

He thus proposes that conflicting frameworks that claim finality for themselves be relativized by some iconoclastic principle (Kliever 1992:123).

A radically transcendent God, he believes, can function as a permanent iconoclastic principle that not only relativizes all concrete world-views and life-styles but subjects them to perpetual revolution in that relative value systems are considered tentative, experimental and objective.

He posits that radical monotheism makes pluralism possible by freeing the world from idolatry; and thus allow people to create world's unto themselves without becoming a law unto themselves.

Kliever's analysis would thus serve the feminist argument, that we need to free religion from idolatry by freeing it from its exclusive male imagery.

Freedom from religious superiority or chauvinism is however promoted by all pluralists, irrespective of the paradigms within which they operate, as a necessary prerequisite for genuine dialogue, without which learning and growth cannot take place.

Interreligious dialogue

Leonard Swidler (1990:3) significantly contributes to the issue of inter-faith dialogue by contending that it is not merely a series of conversations but that it is a new way of thinking, seeing and reflecting on the world.

His understanding of dialogue is that we enter into dialogue primarily so that we can learn, change and grow and not force change on each other.

He appeals to people to listen to each other as openly as possible in an attempt to understand the other's position as precisely and as much from within as possible.

Swidler (1990:194-196), however, holds that genuine or authentic dialogue entails risk as it presupposes a deabsolutising of truth statements.

He deems it necessary for a person to have moved to Kohlberg's stage five in moral reasoning in order to engage in authentic interreligious and interideological dialogue.

He quotes Fowler's views on this:

Stage 5 accepts as axiomatic that truth is more multidimensional and organically interdependent than most theories or accounts of truth can grasp. Religiously, it knows that the symbols, stories, doctrines and liturgies offered by its own or other traditions are inevitably partial, limited to a particular people's experience of God and incomplete. Stage 5 also sees, however, that in the relativity of religious traditions what matters is not their relativity to each other, but their relativity- relativity- to the reality to which they mediate relation. Conjunctive faith [Fowler's stage 5], therefore, is ready for significant encounters with other traditions than its own, expecting that truth has disclosed and will disclose itself in those traditions in ways that may complement or correct its own.

Maura O'Neil (1990:ix), however, contends that even though dialogue is crucial in coping with the problems of modernity, it is crippled in its effect as its base of religious pluralism is not sufficiently plural. She warns that as members of the world religions begin to understand the importance of dialogue and begin to respect each others differences, one particular difference has gone unnoticed, namely gender difference.

Her major contention is "that the female way of being human differs from the male way and that this difference is a major issue in the world's religions and cultures ".

When women are thus excluded from dialogue, monism prevails as opposed to pluralism since a male perspective on religion is not representative of the whole of humanity.

It is thus imperative that women dialogue among themselves so that their uniqueness and selfdefinition can be established, in order to challenge the androcentric philosophical underpinnings of interreligious dialogue (O'Neil 1990:x).

CHAPTER TWO

DOES INCLUSIVITY INCLUDE WOMEN ?

I want to reiterate the point that we cannot divorce the gender issue from the question of an inclusive religious pluralism if we are to effectively work towards a just and acceptable Religion Education.

By way of introduction I will undertake a feminist critique of religion before focusing on the problem of sexism in Religious Education as a subject.

Women in religion

Feminists argue that women are denied full humanity and that they are socialized to view themselves as dependent, less intelligent and derivatives of men.

From earliest childhood they learn subservient roles and value themselves through the eyes of a male culture. The presence of women is often obscured by the use of androcentric language, either in original sacred texts or its translations.

Religious ethics has moreover intensified the internalization of the feminine passive attitudes such as humility, meekness and self sacrifice.

We need to challenge the monopoly of male symbolism in the established religious traditions, a monopoly that dictates that only what is male can be associated with holiness or sacred power.

Feminists assert that this critique of male supremacy is morally critical work which should be done for the spiritual welfare of religion.

We need, moreover, to recognise the connection between an image of God as male and the resultant sexism of religion.

Sacred texts have, to this end, absolutized the male gender in their exclusively male language.

Marjorie Suchocki responds to this use of religious language, which establishes one gender as the norm for human existence, by arguing that gender absolutism serves to devalue the mode of existence outside the absolutized gender (Prozesky 1991:35-45).

Sally Mc Fague argues in this regard, that theology should not engage in the articulation of timeless truths but that it should embody the ethos, and respond to the needs of its particular historical context. Theology for our time should reflect the post-modern sensibility that includes nuclear awareness, connection with nature, and the rise of the dispossessed. A theology exemplifying this sensibility would, according to Mc Fague (1982:36), be holistic, ecological, responsible, non-hierarchical, inclusive and responsive to the nuclear threat. She critically remarks

that the central mark of the post- modern period is the recognition that language, ideas, and symbols are not only historical but are expressions of power and the struggle for interpretive control.

Educators therefore need to challenge the monopoly of male symbols in religious language and recognise that our entire conceptual heritage must be reorientated. One Christian assumption of an all male Trinity, for example, seems unfounded if one considers that both male and female were made in the image of God. It is thus argued that God is not limited by human characteristics, but that human thought and language is.

There is a definite connection between an image of God as male and the resultant sexism of religion if one considers the images of God (namely warrior, king, father) that have persisted in religious thought.

In scripture women are rarely addressed; when they are, it is more often than not on their conduct and outward appearance. Their status throughout religious tradition has remained a marginalised one.

Effects of exclusive symbolism.

Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was the Sphinx. Oedipus said, 'I want to ask one question. Why didn't I recognize my mother?' 'You gave the wrong answer,' said the Sphinx. 'But that was what made everything possible,' said Oedipus. 'No,' she said. 'When I asked, what walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn't say anything about woman.' 'When you say Man,' said Oedipus, 'you include women too. Everyone knows that.' She said, 'That's what you think.'

Susan Henking (1991:265) quotes this myth from The Faber Book Of Twentieth Century Women's Poetry by Muriel Rukeyser, on making the point that; by excluding women from our purview and, yet, talking about human experience, we have created data theories and curricula, which are inadequate. She further contends that we have failed to notice connections between knowledge and power masked by our language and hidden in our naming.

Let us then briefly consider the psychological effects of this abuse of religious symbols and its exclusive language on the human psyche.

Mary Daly (1973:48) points out that the constant perpetuation of a women's mythical inferiority has resulted in an inward directed self-hatred on the part of women. As is

the case with all oppressed groups, women also suffer from a divided consciousness. The oppressor, having invaded the victim's psyche, now exists within themselves. Patriarchal religion has compounded this problem by intensifying the process through which women internalize the consciousness of the oppressor.

The self-depreciation which inclines women to find every cause more important than their own is deeply connected with the myth of feminine evil. To counteract this self-depreciation women will have to build female pride, raising up standards of how it is good to be a woman and so on.

Educators therefore need to embark on some kind of affirmative action to improve both the position and psychological well-being of women, who are the most marginalized, in our society. Women will moreover, become more visible when educators assist in the retrieval of women's lost history.

How then do we address sexism in religion education?

The problem, as I have stated, is that of an exclusive, androcentric religion education.

- * We therefore need to undertake a social analysis since education merely reflects the society we live in.

- * We need to undertake an analysis of our own context which is a conservative, national, calvinistic, patriarchal one which has shaped the images and language of our education system.
- * We should look empirically at what is taught at school and examine how the content (images, language, symbols etc.) reflect back on social practices.
- * We moreover need to be aware of the fact that a religion education which does not include the feminist perspective will fail in it's attempts to restore full humanity to all.
- * And finally, we should constantly consider ways in which pupils can be sensitized to these issues.

Moore's conceptual model as reference

In his latest book Religion Education, Basil Moore provides us with a useful conceptual language with which to talk about the general territory of religion education.

He distinguishes between four levels of conceptual differentiation. The two different approaches which are tackled in the various levels are :

- 1) the single tradition approach where the dominant focus is on one specific religious tradition from which the greater part of the content is drawn and
- 2) the generic approach where the dominant focus is on the broad field of religion and religions.

Content is drawn, in this latter approach, from an inclusive field of religion traditions.

Moore (1991:27- 28) further differentiates between three broad types of orientation, at the third level of conceptual differentiation, which characterises both the single tradition approaches and the generic approaches. While the first type places emphasis on the personal aspects of religion, The second stresses the content and the third attempts a systematic integration of the personal and the content in it's orientation.

Moore points out that in both the single tradition and generic approaches the personal orientation to religion education involves students in a meaning- making quest. It is precisely at this level where educators zoom in with crucial questions, since it is here where students are oriented towards developing their own philosophy of life. It is thus here where pupils' underlying assumptions about gender roles need to be questioned or contested.

It is at this point, I believe, where sexism along with racism needs to be exposed as a social evil. It cannot be divorced from the fundamental questions concerning meaning, purpose and the value of human existence.

In the content orientation, a third level of conceptual differentiation type, a dominantly cognitive orientation prevails. According to Moore (1991:29), the focus, in the generic approaches, is on the histories, beliefs, practices, values etc. of a wide range of religious traditions, on the nature of religion itself and on how and why it seems to be incorporated into the fabric of human life. It is here where educators can reflect on social practices, good and bad, and examine how the imagery, language and symbols we use strengthen or weaken these practices. Pupils can moreover be alerted, at this juncture, to the way in which values have been transmitted and how unquestioned social norms have formed our conceptual heritage.

Having gone through this process we would then need to establish how pupils relate to their social norms, values and practices after having critiqued it from a feminist view point. On reading sacred texts which make reference to women, the following questions could be asked:

Do the references:-

- * value women ?
- * portray them in a positive light?
- * denigrate women?
- * misrepresent women?

Pupils should moreover distinguish whether texts about women are included because of their place in the story of a male hero or if it appears out of any interest in the women of the text.

One other avenue to explore in addressing sexism in religion education is what Moore (1991:35- 36) refers to as the "Doing theology" emphasis in the single tradition approaches. He makes a clear distinction between doctrine (normative belief statements of the faith-sharing community) and theology, an intellectual discipline. Theology, to him, is the process of justifying, authenticating, systematising or debating doctrine. He aptly suggests that educators involve pupils in doing theology with the good of enabling pupils both to understand theological method and to participate with confidence in theological reflection.

Pupils need to know how different groups do theology and what sorts of processes are involved in doing theology.

Racism or sexism could be effectively addressed by trying to understand how a black person or a woman would approach a certain sacred text. Having established that, they would need to further establish the secular view or liberatory view of that same text and determine whether sacred texts should be transmitted uncritically through the ages.

- * How do these texts apply to our present context?
- * What then is contextual theology and to what extent were the original writers contextual theologians?

These are the crucial questions pupils need to ask if we are to find religious practices liberatory in any way.

If not approached in this way, sacred documents would indeed seem oppressive and outmoded for those pupils concerned with basic human rights.

The task of the educator is thus to guide the pupils to ask these very crucial, very relevant questions and by so doing see sacred texts as dynamic and not static or unchanging.

Conclusion

The prospects for an anti- sexist education is not going to happen without great effort from both educators and pupils.

Established norms and social and religious practices will have to be critically evaluated. Pupils' and teachers' own assumptions of reality will constantly be subject to critical analysis in order to establish whether they ascribe to sexual stereotyping or not. More than just the religious sphere is going to be involved but a whole plethora of secular, personal, social practices and ideas are going to be subjected to scrutiny. It is indeed going to be an awesome task for educators especially who are established in their own ways, to successfully raise pupils' consciences against sexism, be it overt or subtle.

The concluding point however is that if we are going to strive for a programme in religion education which is consistent with constitutional guarantees of human and civil rights to freedom of religion, thought and conscience, we will have no alternative than to address and actively combat sexism in religion education.

CHAPTER THREE

DEFINING THE SUBJECT

What is Religion Education

As has been alluded to previously, we have to approach the inherent definitional problem to the subject with much clarity.

Most importantly, we have to be decisive in what religion and what education is and what counts as the two.

We moreover need to determine whether religion education is to be a process of faith formation, or whether it is to be a study of religion.

The term **Religious education**, as is used in schools, has a promotional element which is more suitable in faith instruction and evangelism (a process which negates faith as a free response); while **Religious instruction** is quite explicit in being instruction in the Christian faith.

Religion Education, which is educationally more appropriate means education in religion. A process which calls into account the elements of both education and religion.

Once we've clearly defined the subject topic we need to consider to what extent the curriculum design is going to reflect our reality.

The South African plurality in terms of religion, race and gender should be adequately addressed in any curriculum which is going to be meaningful and relevant.

Questions that need to be answered first before developing a curriculum should be the following:-

- * Is education:-
- * the development of skills ?
- * Is it to exercise greater faith ?
- * Is it to promote greater understanding ?
- * Is it to further the child's basic morality ?

Curriculum design can no longer be an esoteric practice as it has been in the past, but should be focused on equipping pupils with the necessary educational skills of understanding and tolerance. It should, in other words, be focused on the future.

Christo Lombard (1991:6) suggests the following methodological approaches in the drawing up of such a curriculum:

Historical perspective

Learners can be guided to look at topics and issues from a broad historical perspective. For instance, one could first focus on current perspectives on these issues and then look back through African tradition, world history and church history as a background for biblical and religious perspectives.

Religious perspectives

Learners can be guided to honour their own religious experiences and religious traditions while simultaneously taking the experiences and traditions of others seriously.

Creative activities

Learners can be stimulated to participate in creative art work as a vehicle for religious expression. These activities can include drawing , music, dancing, drama, writing and crafts.

Emphasis on skills

As should be clear from the learning objectives, strong emphasis should be put on skills like analysing concepts, and the interpreting of texts in the process of developing an analytical attitude and a critical spirit.

Various methodologies will be suggested in the work packages for teachers to stimulate imaginative teaching.

Focusing on relevance

Motivation can be assured firstly by selecting learner relevant material and further by focusing on contemporary views as reflected in mass media e.g. television, radio and newspapers. Learners should be stimulated to formulate their own perspectives on topics or issues and to relate these to Namibian realities.

Cross-curricular work

The religion and Moral education teacher should investigate linkages with other subjects in the curriculum, so as to draw out moral and religious issues for evaluation in Religious and Moral Education and the other subjects.

This curriculum model promotes moral education as a category synonymous with the teaching of religion. Such an assumption does not necessarily hold true; and is too complex an issue to be addressed within the parameters of this thesis.

Its relevance for our context, however, should be noted, as such curriculum suggestions emerged out of the Namibian struggle to be free from the ills that are still with us.

South African teachers are nevertheless becoming increasingly aware of the dichotomy that exist in the democratic ideas that they hold, and the situation which they are presented with in the classroom.

Much headway has been made by teachers who reappropriate the history taught at schools. Several history text books are moreover being written to restore the muted voices of South Africa's majority. Attempts are therefore being made to have a syllabus which is going to be representative of the aspirations of all South Africans.

One could hereby conclude, that people's consciousness have been raised to the dangers of an imperialist ideology.

Religion pluralists likewise appeal that this same consciousnessraising be extended to religion education taught at school.

Multi-racialism/multi-culturalism should inevitably include religious plurality in its definition.

In identifying the different religions such as Islam or Christianity, we will further have to identify what particular variety or heritage of Islam or Christianity is going to count as religion.

Such a process in itself poses inherent problems in that Calvinist- informed Christianity, for example, tends to negate Catholicism as being Christian.

This phenomenon is all the more reason why we should approach the teaching of the subject from an educational and not a religious perspective.

Given the school syllabus and time constraints, it would be educationally viable to study the major faiths practised in South Africa. This will entail all the religions which pupils have access to, to avoid it becoming an abstract study.

This, needless to say, should include African Traditional Religion whose existence has hitherto been denied.

African Traditional Religion as sub-category

Nokuzola Mndende (The end of the tunnel: 28) argues that African Traditional Religion is not static and is certainly not primitive. It, like other religions, is dynamic and capable of changing to new situations.

Urbanisation has added to the fact that African Traditional Religion has had to 'acclimatise' to new and varying contexts, other than that of the rural situation, where accessibility and the right to exercise important rituals without inhibition is not problematic.

Due to the subversion of African religious practices, it has become extremely difficult to find information for school instruction that can clearly outline the content and practices of those adhering to African Traditional Religion.

African scholars like Mbiti, have in fact tried to explain African Traditional Religion, by using a Christian analysis.

In a sense, I believe, these scholars feared risking their academic credibility by aligning themselves openly with a religion that was previously denied by missionaries and frowned upon as primitive.

Mndende (The end of the tunnel:30), however, outlines three features of African Traditional Religion:

- * a belief in a Supreme Being who is beyond human understanding - too far from human beings for direct communication;
- * a belief in the ancestors who are the intermediaries between the living and God;
- * a belief in the efficacy of rituals (which provide a means for communication with the ancestors). There are rituals incorporating the child into the community (made up of the dead and the living), rituals connected with rites

of passage, thanksgiving, appeasement, etc. These rituals reinforce the sense of belonging which underpins African Traditional Religion.

She furthermore believes that we should include African Traditional Religion in a multi - religion curriculum ; to promote a strong sense of identity among black educators and pupils and by so doing, cultivate a pride in their heritage.

By promoting the legitimacy of African Traditional Religion, adherents of the faith will thus openly and comfortably declare it and promote its inherent concept of ubuntu (End of the tunnel: 31).

Even though certain statistics conclude that eighty percent of the South African population is Christian (a point which has been highly contested), we should guard against it being Christian centred. Pupils have the right to be informed about other religions they do not know:- a general aim of education.

Conclusion

Curriculum design should furthermore reflect the reality of women in the communities of faith which are going to be studied.

A process which should be done critically, from women's perspective, more specifically women who have been sensitized to issues of women's oppression.

It is thus imperative that the designers of an inclusive Religion Education curriculum be representative of the reality it is to promote.

Susan Henking (1991:268- 269) expresses the concern that pupils, who have no ability to reflect critically on the impact of androcentrism, sexism, racism, heterosexism, class oppression and imperialism, often graduate from a course in religion education.

Teachers of religion education are furthermore encouraged to transform their teaching which in turn requires them to set up new goals, course content, format, and teaching.

She draws on Schuster and Van Dyne's "transformed course" which is particularly helpful for the teacher who wants to guard against exclusivity and who wants to include all groups who stand outside the dominant culture.

- * be self-conscious about **methodology** use gender as a category of analysis, no matter what is on the syllabus (even if all males);
- * present changed content in a **changed context** and be aware that all knowledge is historical and socially constructed, not immutable;
- * develop an **interdisciplinary perspective**, to make visible the language of discourse, assumptions of a field, and analytical methods by contrast with other fields;

- * pay meaningful attention to intersections of **race, class, and cultural differences** within gender and avoid universalizing beyond data;
- * study new subjects in their **own terms**, not merely as other, alien, non-normative, and non- Western, and encourage a true **pluralism**;
- * **test paradigms** rather than merely “add on” women figures or issues, and incorporate analysis of gender, race, and class by a thorough reorganization of available knowledge;
- * make student’s experience and **learning process** part of the explicit content of the course, thereby reaffirming the transcendent goals of the course; and
- * recognize that, because **culture reproduces itself in the classroom**, the more conscious we are of this phenomenon, the more likely we are to turn it to our advantage in teaching the transformed course (ibid).

CHAPTER FOUR

LANGUAGE CONSTRUCTS OUR CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE

We are used to hearing: "God the father loves you, and if you join the brotherhood and fellowship of all Christians you will become sons of God and brothers of Christ, who died for all men," Such masculinized God language has communicated for centuries to women that they are nonentities, subspecies of men, subordinated and inferior to men not only on a cultural but also on a religious plane. The combination of male language for God with the stress on the sovereignty and absolute authority of the patriarchal God has sanctioned men's drive for power and domination in the church as well as in society.

(Fiorenza 1979:139)

Language in Religion Education.

We shall be focusing on the very important question of language in this section of the paper. The language we use when conveying concepts to pupils is going to be of fundamental importance if we are to attain the goal of a just dispensation in the classroom. Our underlying premise is therefore, that pluralism and non-sexism in Religion Education cannot be achieved without a total revision of the language we have been accustomed to hitherto.

The reviewer Sheila Greeve very succinctly sets out Sallie McFague's view's on the different modes of theology in her book entitled **Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age**. The metaphorical mode of theology which Greeve (1990:36) identifies is centrally concerned with language. McFague's contention that human's do not encounter reality directly but only through the mediation of symbol, ideas and interpretive schemes is pointed out.

Whilst recognising that McFague's model of theology is crucial to our own understanding of theology, it is desirable that we recognise the term (theology) in it's broader sense, and applicable to all religious discourses.

Implicit in McFague's understanding of theology as metaphorical, is the notion that no sacred text or tradition is final but rather that theology is "fundamentally an imaginative activity that is not tied to the past but seeks a vision adequate to the challenges of our nuclear age" (Greeve 1990:37).

Theology is thus seen as dynamic, contextual, non- hierarchical and pluralistic.

Greeve (1990:39) adds to McFague's analysis the point that

The post-modern ethos with its appreciation of nature and interdependence, its sensitivity to diversity and the struggle for an inclusive community, and its relinquishment of the claims of absolute truth issues forth in a pluralistic, non-hierarchical, ecological, holistic, and radically inclusive theology.

She furthermore makes the point that " language, ideas, and symbols are not only historical but are expressions of power and the struggle for interpretive control" (ibid).

Chidester (1982:2- 4) similarly holds that religion

involves human beings in beliefs, practices, and forms of association that activate a particular distribution of power " and " a process by which human beings negotiate issues of ultimate authority, meaning, and value within specific social, economic, and political contexts.

Being mindful of the symbolic appeals which language evokes, Pricket (1986:217) similarly contends that metaphor and symbol are the appropriate vehicles for the living community and that while philosophic systems and the logic of scientific discoveries change, the great formative and focal images of art and religion live on.

There is a growing consensus that we need to challenge the monopoly of male symbols in religious language and recognise that our entire conceptual heritage must be reorientated for, while God is not limited by human characteristics , human thought and language is.

Hunt (1989:69) argues in this regard that

If the guiding symbols of a religion, beginning with its divinity and saviour figure, are masculine, then patriarchal doctrine is assured. Those doctrines shape the social fabric. If there is to be social change, there must be religious change.

I will now undertake a critical look at some uses of exclusive language in the Christian Scripture as it is this tradition that has largely formed my conceptual framework of reference. Different arguments will thus be presented in this regard.

Further examples of masculine language in sacred texts.

The view that religion and politics are dimensions of human experience engaged in the meaningful exercise of power, and that religion in particular is that dimension of human experience which is concerned with varieties of power that are felt to be sacred, confirms the view that the stage is set for exploitation of girls and women in sacred texts.

This is furthermore perpetuated by the "Father- God" image in that the political effects of naming God as exclusively masculine, is that husbands and fathers are godlike as God is depicted as being husbandlike and fatherlike (Mollenkott 1983:5).

The argument that the Father- God image is needed as an invitation to all fathers to be perfect is ineffective if one considers that the exclusive use of the Father image for God throughout the ages, has not helped fathers or men for that matter.

The type of relationship that suggests that one partner is godlike is thus seen as a dominance- submission relationship.

A patriarchal exegesis of Paul's dictums about women and marriage further reinforces women's second class status. Even today orthodox Jewish males thank God that they were not born women.

The crux of women's oppression however, seems to be the gender of God .

Carol Christ claims that the exclusively male images of divinity create the impression that female power can never be fully legitimate (Gardon 1989:260). The fact that God's earthly representatives, ministers of religion, were all male until recently is significant in this regard.

The feminist dilemma of exclusive male symbols in the Bible is aptly expressed by Hendrik Vroom (1991:77) who claims that as God is above human language and thought, people have to use metaphors and symbols to describe the human experience of transcendence.

The metaphorical character of religious language however, implies two things for him: firstly that people who give different descriptions to their Transcendent Being may be pointing to the same sort of experience and that secondly, people may also have incompatible experiences which do not point to the same God.

This is generally the overriding view which is going to influence the debate on male and female symbols of the Deity.

In determining the difference between gender and sex, Bynum (1987:7) posits that gender is the term which is used to refer to those differences between males and females that are created through psychological and social development within a familial, social, and cultural setting.

Gender is thus culturally constructed. She furthermore argues that what people understand themselves to be is learned and shaped within culture, and religious symbols are one of the ways in which such meanings are taught and appropriated.

One other feminist contention is that when we see God only as father and we ignore the pluriform images of God, we short-circuit our full humanity and therefore the multiple aspects relating to God (Mollenkot 1983:4). Symbols of mutuality are therefore called for.

Olsen (1983:243) contends that neutral imagery is not enough but that female imagery must be positively included if women are to become full members of the worshipping community and the society it projects. She confirms the allegations of some feminist theologians that sex-neutral language does not include women, by making reference to psychological study results in this regard.

God as Androgyne

The Jewish scholar Dr Azila Talit Reisenberger (Monday paper 1992:3) argues that the creation story needs to be rewritten and that the idea of Eve being created from Adam's rib is based on a mistranslation.

According to Reisenberger, the Hebrew word *zela* actually means side and not rib, as is commonly held.

She believes that her research provides conclusive evidence that Adam and Eve were created from one body which had both male and female characteristics.

The Hermaphrodite Adam thus had parts containing female organs removed from his side while the male organs were left in tact. God then formed and sealed both components.

She points to Jesus who she believes, makes reference to this concept in Matthew 19:4 when he says

"As man and woman were joined in marriage, they became one flesh."

She thus considers the view that women were an appendage or an after thought of creation as fallacy and a creation of a society that saw women as subservient or of secondary importance to men.

While Reisenberger's work is seen as having far reaching implications for Feminist theology, it does however fall short of answering the question of who God is. Its significance in challenging the traditional hierarchical structuring of creation cannot be denied, but it does in fact not promote the point that God is an androgynous being, which would be a logical conclusion of her research.

If the first beings, being androgynous, were created in the image of God , it would thus stand to reason that God is an Androgyne.

Rita Gross (1979:168) resorts to this bisexual androgynous imagery of God, in her attempts to promote both the complementary images of God as male and female.

She sees the promotion of exclusive male imagery as a reflection and a legitimation of the oppression and eclipsing of women. She immediately qualifies that God really is neither male nor female and that we can merely talk about images of God. She succinctly points out that female images of God

should not be daring, degrading, or alien. If it is daring, degrading or alienating to speak of God using female pronouns and imagery, that perhaps indicates something about the way women and the feminine are valued. Therefore, we might say that the ultimate symbol of our degradation is our inability to say "God- She".

Maura O'Neil (1990:37), however, believes that the notion of androgyny fails to serve the feminist purpose since the concept presupposes a psychic dualism that identifies maleness with one half of human capacities and femaleness with the other. She supports the view of Rosemary Ruether, instead, that androgyny fails to represent women as fully human.

Symbolic Appeals

A feminist critique of the God symbolism implies that as male power is legitimated, female power is denigrated by the image of God as exclusively male. Further contention in this regard is that female power is not altogether denied in patriarchy but that it is not recognized as legitimate and cannot be openly and directly expressed.

And that power which can only be expressed deviously, secretly or through manipulation is always suspected of being dangerous or evil. Reference is made to Eve's power, in the book of Genesis, which is outside the law and commandment of God and is perceived as evil in exegetical tradition.

Chidester's (1988:xiii) assertion that religion is not just concerned with meaning but that it is also a vehicle of power is reiterated by Mc Glashan (1989:514) who further proposes that power is especially and disturbingly evident when the symbolization, is that the very self of the believer, or important elements of his/her life are totally and unquestioningly identified with the external religious symbol in question. She thus comes to be tied to the symbol in a bond that is the stronger for being conscious, to the extent that an attack on the symbol becomes an attack on the believer.

Mc Glashan's definition and characteristics of a mature religious faith are critical for those involved in the revision of symbols. The first characteristic he lists is the dogmatic certainty that any single formulation of truth cannot be totally adequate and authoritative.

He argues that words too are symbols of a kind and cannot capture or convey universal, fixed and unambiguous meaning.

Mature faith instead is open to doubt and questioning, and is ready to entertain paradox and apparent contradiction. It is more inclined to an inclusive both/and attitude than to black and white, either/ or exclusiveness.

It is rooted in a secure sense of personal identity, because the believing subject is content to acknowledge that he does not and cannot know everything about himself or about anyone else either. Such an attitude enables that unconditional acceptance of others in all their mystery and diversity which is the necessary precondition of interpersonal encounter (Mc Glashan 1989:519- 520).

He closes by brilliantly remarking that perhaps because it requires the surrender of omnipotent control of self and others, it is only this kind of faith that allows God to be God.

Conclusion

The feminist struggle for new symbols to be fully representative of a new vision of humanity is by no means unique or unusual as the search for a new and more meaningful reality is always accompanied by a symbolic contest where claims are made in all directions. We are presently experiencing this very scenario on the political front. The old South African flag had to give way to a more representative flag which the majority of people can relate to. It thus had to be more inclusive in order that people invest greater national pride and significance in it. There are of course those who have benefited substantially from the oppression of others and who resist the changes and prefer to cling onto old symbols.

Many more symbolic changes are however still to follow in this new national attempt to be as inclusive a nation as possible.

Places of national importance will undergo name changes; racially offensive words or terms will be outlawed as has been the case in places like Namibia.

The concluding point therefore is that, the quest for meaning will always be evidenced by the symbolic appeals people make. Much like the inevitable changes that a new national consciousness demands, a feminist quest for a new vision of humanity will similarly demand new symbols and imagery.

The substitution of the Goddess, an exclusively female image for the Deity, is often met with shock or aversion: a point which demonstrates the power of images. Exclusive imagery of any kind would moreover be tantamount to idolatry.

We do however need to speak about God in Religion Education hence the importance of metaphor.

The way we view God and ultimately ourselves is determined by the language we use since it is language that shapes our consciousness. It is therefore imperative that we use inclusive imagery in our reference to the Deity which would express the full humanity of all people.

CHAPTER FIVE

APPROPRIATING TEXTS WITHIN A FEMINIST FRAMEWORK

it is only when the crucial importance of religion, myth, and symbol in human life are understood that feminists can begin to understand how deeply traditional religions have betrayed women. If religion, myth, and symbol have outlived their usefulness, then one should be no more than irritated at the quaint archaism of traditional religious sexism. But, once one recognizes the importance of religion, then an enormous sense of injustice must follow the discovery that religions are sexist and that they continue to exert a powerful influence on society.

(Christ & Plaskow 1979:3)

Looking behind the written text.

Anne Mc Grew Bennet was one of the early feminists who realized the centrality of Biblical language and symbolism. She argued that if the guiding symbols of a religion are masculine then a patriarchal doctrine is assured.

This doctrine in turn shapes our social fabric; so it stands to reason that if there is to be any social change, there has to be religious change (Hunt 1989 :69).

Hunt (1989:53), who promotes the recovery of women's history, very succinctly points out that women have been controlled by those who control the historical records.

The language employed has caused women to be invisible as historians write about mankind. Women historians are therefore reminding us that a past without women is a created ideology designed to control women and to keep them subservient.

The following section will focus on alternative ways in which to approach sacred texts.

The material can simultaneously be used in senior secondary classes to introduce feminist readings or ways of looking at a text or theological problem.

1. A feminist rereading of Genesis 2- 3.

I will firstly address the validity of the Biblical account in Genesis 1- 11 and then focus on the creation story of chapters 2- 3.

By employing a feminist theological approach, I will illustrate how the Bible can serve to challenge the monopoly of male symbols which our theological language has promoted through the ages in order to relegate women and the role women play both within and outside the religious sphere.

We have to firstly recognise that our entire conceptual heritage must be reorientated in order to come to a feminist theology and subsequently a new way of viewing ourselves and more especially the relation between women and men.

The Genesis 1- 11 story certainly poses a problem to any historian as no factual data can be located in a given time and no direct connections can be made with any other known events. No geological findings as yet can substantiate any of the information. Commentaries such as Anderson's "The Living World of the Old Testament" overcome the problem of Genesis 1- 11 by not addressing it at all. His overview instead starts off with Genesis 12- 50 and postulates that Biblical history starts at Genesis 12.

The priestly account of creation (Gen. 1:1- 2:4) is remarkably similar to the Babylonian account of creation, called the Enuma Elish. This story which is known from 1700 BC. is much older than the Biblical creation account.

The striking similarity between the two stories and of its creation immediately renders problematic the authenticity of the Biblical account.

The major point of difference exists in the theology of the Biblical account which makes no mention of the battle between Yahweh and the forces of chaos. Before we form any concluding remarks on this section I would like us to focus on the creation of woman and man.

A reading of Genesis 2- 3 appears to legitimate male supremacy and female subordination.

In his commentary of Gen.3, Boadt depicts the serpent as playing on Eve's vanity. This androcentric interpretation perpetuates the negative light in which women have been viewed. Adam's weakness is seldom denounced or mentioned. Women

therefore need to reclaim their dignity and heritage by interrogating this text in order to free it from such misogynist interpretation.

Phyllis Trible (1979:24) suggests that women reread the passage to understand and to appropriate it. 'adham', she points out, is a generic term for humankind.

In commanding 'adam' not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, God is speaking to both the man and woman (Gen.2:16- 7). Until the differentiation of female and male (Gen. 2:21- 23), 'adham' is basically androgynous, a point explained in the previous chapter. She further explicates Gen. 2 :18 "helper fit for him" by pointing out that in the Old Testament the word helper ('ezer) has many usages. It can be a proper name for a male, or characterize God. God is the helper of Israel and as helper, God creates and saves (Ex.18:4; Deut.33:7,26,29).

'ezer is thus a relational term which designates a beneficial relationship which pertains to God, people and animals. The word 'ezer' does therefore not specify positions within relationships and more particularly, it does not imply inferiority (Trible (1979:74- 75).

A feminist reappropriation of the creation of man and woman will take cognisance of the fact that man has no part in making woman. He exercises no control over her existence.

He is neither participant, nor spectator nor consultant at her birth. Like man, woman owes her life solely to God.

A feminist exegesis of Genesis 2- 3 can further undercut the patriarchal interpretations which are alien to the text. Throughout the story the woman is portrayed as the more intelligent, more aggressive one with greater sensibilities.

In quoting God, she becomes hermeneutically involved and interprets the prohibition (not to eat of the tree).

Trible (1979:79) argues that the woman is thus both theologian and translator. She contemplates the tree and takes into account all the possibilities. When she takes the fruit and eat she acts of her own accord and the decision is hers alone.

She does not consult with the man to seek his advice or permission. She acts independently.

By contrast the man is depicted as the silent , passive recipient who does not theologize, contemplate or envision the full possibilities of his deed. He displays no initiative, dominance, aggression or decision making.

The woman is thus attributed with intelligence in her quest for knowledge. The man who lacks initiative is portrayed as the more subservient one. The myth that is usually applied to this story, about a woman's submissive role thus becomes ineffective.

To summarise then one could reiterate Gordon's (1985:25) sentiment that whether Genesis 1- 11 is fact or myth is not important; what is important is what the facts represent. Both the Babylonian and Biblical creation accounts assert that God exists. The authenticity of the Adam and Eve story is not of prime importance. The story tells us something fundamental about nature; about the process of developing the independence which God gave to men and women when they were created "in the image of God".

Gordon (ibid) further postulates that a myth is a story in symbolic form which conveys a truth about God. The literary mechanism is the same as that of a New Testament parable. We do not question whether the Prodigal Son is a real person or ask his name. The actual point is the message the story brings and similarly with the Genesis 1- 11 story.

An interesting observation concerning the Gen:1- 11 narrative is the inconsistency with which theologians approach it.

Respected theologians never question the symbolism or any aspect of the Noah Epic. It's mythical content is restricted only to entertaining the very young Sunday School child.

Few theologians will risk their reputation by making any serious form of reference to, let alone attempt to authenticate a doctrine by appropriating the Noah Epic.

Yet the creation story is constantly used and has become the major theological enterprise to support women's second rate citizenship, and the ensuing scapegoating of women for the origin of sin. Is it not part of the Gen:1- 11 narrative too?

2. A rereading of the Hagar vs Sarai story

Like the creation story most Moslem, Jewish and Christian pupils will be able to relate to this particular story as reference is made to it in their respective sacred texts.

The words of Winternitz "Woman has always been the best friend religion ever had; but religion has by no means been the best friend woman ever had" (Jewett 1975:87) displays the painful dialectic women have experienced in religious institutions.

The Old testament story of Hagar and Sarai has to this extent, often served as a useful tool in the hands of those who attempt to depict women as ruthless, heartless and irrational beings. A superficial reading of the biblical narrative on these two women certainly appears to reinforce such sexual stereotyping where the male inevitably emerges as the rather innocent, level-headed being, caught between two vindictive women.

In Genesis 12- 23 the narrative depicts Abram as the blameless God-fearing man caught between two squabbling women.

Von Rad (1972: 186) remarks in his commentary that Abram " plays an unhappy role between these two headstrong women". He then later, with reference to Gunkel, calls them "raw-boned women".

I choose to argue the point that both women acted legitimately and understandably given the social and legal context within which they found themselves.

By comparing the story pattern evidenced in Genesis 16 and 21 with Canaanite and Mesopotamian tales (Epic of Aqhat from Ugarit and Gilgamesh epic) which follow the same pattern, Jo- ann Hackett (1971) advocates that the scene depicted in the biblical text is about the capricious use of superior power.

All these stories feature a vulnerable protagonist who demeans a being of superior powers, who in turn reacts out of reasonable proportion and demands that the underling be severely punished.

Hagar plays the role of protagonist and the vulnerable underling in her story. Hackett recognises Hagar as the hero of her story and thus challenges previous commentators who have seen Abram as the focal character.

Jewett (1975:88) who considers Sarai's request to Abram as an act of degradation of her own sex remarks that the barren wife had a "heavy cross to carry" and was often scorned and made to feel miserable by others.

Given the social and legal setting of the time, I will argue that Sarai's request was indeed not an act of denigration of another woman, but a means of social upliftment for herself. I will therefore further argue, that they were both victims of a very patriarchal society and of androcentric biblical editing.

According to legal custom a barren wife could bring to the marriage her own personal maid, who was not available to her husband as a concubine in the same way his own female slaves were.

Along with Hagar's impending pregnancy Sarai's status and power as wife and mistress becomes threatened as Hagar now becomes Abram's concubine and soon

to be the mother of his child. Sarai's rage thus becomes understandable.

Hackett (1971:13) portrays Sarai's context firstly as being the wife (or the chief wife) of a wealthy pastoralist and perhaps the only legal wife. The second status as a consequence of the first - that her sons would be Abram's heirs. She has no sons and her situation becomes somewhat tenuous. She further points out that it was expected of Sarai to provide another woman and that her social status would be dropped until she herself could bear children.

von Rad (1972:191) likewise concedes that there was no greater sorrow for an Israelite woman than childlessness.

Hagar on the other hand, who is not consulted on the matter, is to be uplifted socially as she is to bear Abram's heir. This situation, Hackett argues, would bring tension into any household. She (Hackett) contests traditional Genesis scholarship which trivializes the experiences of the female characters by portraying Hagar as 'defiant' and Sarai as 'passionate' and 'raging' and Abram as being caught between them.

In her threatened position Sarai turns to Abram, not to Hagar, which is in accordance with the legal system, as Hagar now belongs to Abram (von Rad 1972:1972).

Abram, rather cowardly, acts calmly and without sensitivity to Hagar's plight when Sarai in Gen.16:5 says "I gave my maid to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me." To this Abram replies "Behold, your maid is in your power, do to her as you please, "Gen.16:6. Sarai is thus permitted to do with Hagar as she wishes.

According to Hammurabi's code the punishment for a serving maid who has a child by her master and who places herself equal to her mistress, shall be reduction to the status of a slave (von Rad 1972: 192).

We are told in Gen.16:6 that Sarai dealt harshly with Hagar who then fled. She is then found in the wilderness by an angel of the Lord who promises her that her descendants will be greatly multiplied.

Hackett (1971:15) points out that this is the only case in Genesis where this kind of promise is made to a woman. Von Rad (ibid) remarks that the reader, who, with Abram, is expecting the fulfilment of the great promise, is put off as Ishmael is not the heir of promise but a secondary descendant. He further remarks that "the narrator seems to be most sympathetic toward Hagar, although she offended most obviously against right and custom. But the reader understands that a child so conceived in defiance or in little faith cannot be the heir of promise".

This, to me, displays a tremendous Israelite bias, the greatest fear was not Hagar's defiance but the fact that Abram's son would not be fully Israelite but rather half Egyptian.

According to chapter 2:9 "Sarai saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abram, playing with her son Isaac". So she said to Abram, "Cast out this

woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac".

Hackett cautiously observes that the Hebrew text simply states that Ishmael was playing.

She questions the silence that follows. She undercuts androcentric explanations such as von Rad's, that Sarai was a "jealous mother", by suggesting that the original story must have said that Ishmael did something vile to Sarah, to make her think or to remind her that he was also in a position to inherit, since that is her complaint to Abram later in the episode.

Hackett (1971:20- 21) further postulates that the text is complete as it stands since the verb in 21:9 (*sa haq*) which is also an allusion to the name Isaac, means "to laugh".

Ishmael could thus be playing, laughing or "Isaac- ing".

The possibility thus exists that Sarai was threatened by and complaining that Ishmael was doing something to indicate he was just like Isaac, that they were equal.

The suggestion that Ishmael was striving for a social and familial position that was not his to take does not seem unlikely. Hackett thus views Ishmael as the protagonist

and not Hagar. She brilliantly remarks that the J writer has given a twist to the story, perhaps, by making the protagonist female; as Hagar had unexpectedly received the promise in Gen.16:10 that her "seed" will be multiplied beyond a number - a promise typically given to a male. A sentiment which exposes the male patriarchal bias of the narrator. Although Abram does what Sarai asks in Gen.21:10 he appears more sensitive and shows more concern than in chapter 16. The concern however is not for Hagar, the text tells us, but for Ishmael, his son.

He does not calmly tell Sarai to do whatever she wants to, but worries about his son's welfare.

To summarise then, what becomes evident in a rereading of the text, against its social and legal backdrop, is the point that the story is about the kind of power some human beings have over other human beings, and more specifically over a human being in a most vulnerable position namely female, slave, and foreign.

Further questions could be asked in an advanced class such as:-

- * Why was the story included in the first place?
- * How does the Hagar story function in relation to the narrative as a whole?

Mary hunt (1989:63) unveils even more in her attempts to celebrate women's history by pointing out that it was through Sarah that the great promise was given. Abram had already had Ishmael and six sons from the woman he married after Sarah's death, yet Gen.17:15- 16 announces that "She shall be the mother of nations; the kings of many people shall spring from her."

Hunt furthermore posits that the name of the Hebrew people comes from Sarah's name, since Sarah and Israel have the same root: "sra". Sarah moreover possessed the gift of prophecy and the Shekinah, the cloud that indicated God's indwelling presence, was over her tent and not Abram's.

Hunt reinforces her argument by questioning the importance of Sarah's grave and Abram's felt need to own the plot of land on which she was buried. No other sale of land is so carefully documented in the Bible. Why was it so necessary?

Did Abraham have to establish a legal right to Sarah's bones and Sarah's inheritance?

The tribe went back to Sarah's family for wives for her son and grandson (ibid).

She poignantly closes by asking if we are not the daughters and sons of Sarah and her consort Abram and when, in fact, we are going to celebrate Sarah.

One can link these questions to the earlier discussion on language and power and the relation between these concepts.

In eliciting further discussion, this can be viewed against the feminist view of authority as being in horizontal rather than vertical terms; as empowerment of others rather than domination of others; as an enabling gift which benefits the whole faith community.

Empowering the disempowered.

The Christian feminist theologian Letty Russel (1984:84- 87) contends that authority in community reflects , more clearly, Jesus' ministry and that "there is a continuing multiplication factor wherever the gifts of love are shared in community" and that if, "we begin in every circumstance to value the people with whom we work, it will become easier for us to find the gifts they have that can be shared with others."

Hackett's (1985:21) distinction between power and authority is critical for our analysis at this point. Power she contends, is the ability to realise one's dreams; while authority is power that is supported or legitimated by social structures.

The argument that a woman's power in the Ancient Israelite society was derived through the man or men she was associated with and not through her own status, is crucial in understanding how this impinged on women's lives.

Hackett points out that polygyny would further disempower women in that no one wife would be able to influence her husband exclusively either through manipulation

or by withholding sexual privileges. Co-wives would furthermore become a threat to each other.

Whilst acknowledging this and the effects it had and still has on women's behaviour it is important that woman be viewed as the victims of a society that denied woman direct access to power with no other alternative than to seek it by co-ersion or manipulation.

Notwithstanding the fact that there are several other examples of women who yielded much power of their own and acted independently and autonomously.

Women such as the judge Deborah, Mariam, Mary Magdalene, the first apostle to whom Jesus appeared, and of course Mary the mother of Jesus, a great power house who had the courage to bear a child in a society that ostracised unwed mothers or illegitimate children.

The story of Mary, the mother of Jesus is one more case in point. The gospels of Matthew and Luke narrate the story totally differently .

While Matthew, in typical patriarchal style, tells of Joseph and God deciding on the immaculate conception without consulting with, or considering Mary's feelings, Luke promotes Mary's autonomy in the matter.

Luke stresses Mary,s motherhood as being a free choice and the fact that she is a person in her own right.

Her humanity does not depend on a man. When the angel appears to her she does not consult Joseph or ask for his opinion, she makes her own decision.

Matthew, on the other hand, tells us of the tremendous strength of Joseph in accepting God's power and chooses to focus on her purity and goodness instead.

We are never told of the strength these women had, instead we are always told of their obedience and meekness. We are never told about the fact that Mary made an autonomous decision to carry the child, without having to consult with Joseph first. She recognised her own power and exercised it over her own body.

Androcentric Biblical editing however ensures that we see these women as subservient beings who obtain their happiness by satisfying their male partners.

Patriarchal scholarship has moreover had a field day in extending this perspective under various themes hence the need for a feminist scholarship, which is going to reclaim women's dignity by reclaiming their submerged or lost history.

Women are however reminded that they will always need to subvert the pyramid of domination in their attempts to challenge the paradigm of authority due to its pervasiveness in all other areas of our lives and in social institutions.

One area which attempts to subvert that pyramid is inclusive language for God and humanbeings since it is language that "both describes and conceals the structure of social reality" when language is therefore challenged, "the reality it represents is also challenged" (Russel 1984:91).

3. Reappropriating some Islamic texts.

Modernist arguments have also been used to interpret the Qur'an in attempts to promote the sacred document as being an egalitarian document which favours human rights which extends to women (Keddie 1988:86).

One such exercise in reinterpretation applies to the Quranic text which states that "men can marry up to four wives if they can treat the wives equally, and later that no matter how hard they try men will not be able to treat wives equally" (ibid).

The logical modernist conclusion thus is that the Qur'an was against polygamy since the conditions it sets out are impossible to meet.

The question one could raise by considering the implications of looking at this particular interpretation of the Quranic text, while not detracting from the traditional view that the Qur'an is the literal word of God, are what the implications would be for women in particular.

High school pupils could discuss the past and present day social spin-offs of the text.

Further questions to consider in the event of a total outlawing of polygamy would be women's property rights and veiling.

The question of veiling has moreover been a much contested issue for Islamic feminists.

Nikki Keddie (1988:78) interestingly points out that veiling and the seclusion of women really go back to pre-Islamic Near Eastern civilization. Reference to veiling in an Assyrian text dating to about 1200 BC prohibited prostitutes veil and veiling later became a sign of status and respectability.

Keddie further argues that Muslims adopted the practices of veiling and seclusion of women from the peoples they conquered and who later made up the majority of the population in the Islamic empire.

With this historical background, the need arises for a modernist revision or reinterpretation of the practice.

While male sporting activities are encouraged in the Muslim world women are prohibited due to the veiling requirement at all times.

Ann Mayer (1988:104) points out the benefits of athletic activities in modern society and culture in terms of its promotion of health and longevity and the individual empowerment and development of skills .

Against this background senior pupils could engage in discussions of women's social and cultural status and to what extent the practice of veiling and seclusion infringes on their human rights.

This same issue could moreover be approached differently ; in that the pupils could be placed in the position of a modernist Islamic theologian or Islamic feminist position and left to interpret the problem accordingly.

The problem of veiling is compounded by Keddie's (1988:81) argument that veiling and seclusion are nowhere enjoined in the Qur'an.

Keddie further argues that later Islamic interpretation is erroneous in that the Qur'anic injunction for women to veil their bossoms and hide their ornaments, does not make logical or linguistic sense. The interpretation of "ornaments" to mean everything except hands and feet does not hold due to the specific inclusion of bossoms, which forms part of the body.

The Muslim feminist theologian, Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, does however remind us that western missionary education has come under severe criticism and is seen as using women to undermine Islam.

The very popular and influential writer, Muhammad Qutb, is pointed out as being one of the promoters of the idea that the liberation of women is one of the deviations from the teachings of Islam. He posits that the liberation of women;

is the most malicious means used by Crusader imperialism to destroy the muslim entity in an effort to uproot it. By itself, it was guaranteed to

disseminate moral, intellectual and religious disintegration among the Muslim people which all other means combined would have failed to achieve.... when the woman goes out naked into the street displaying her allurements to every seeker, arousing animal desire in the man, then there is no Islam, no religion, no doctrine... no bonding in public morality, no resistance. In this [situation] Crusading imperialism finds the opportunity to aim its blow. (Haddad 1985:289).

This view has served as a most successful deterrent for any Muslim women who seeks liberation from religious and cultural oppression. Muslim feminists are often accused of conspiring against Islam and courting western imperialism when they challenge the position of women within Islam.

This has sadly lead to much discomfort for those who are committed to both Islam and the feminist cause.

Pupils could in turn examine what effect this latter view of women and Islam would have on the psyche of a young girl (and boy) as opposed to that of a modernist Muslim theologian.

* Should women be held responsible for men's sexuality ?

* How and when should men be taught accountability for their own morality and sexuality?

* What effects has misogynist literature and theology had on women?

The following article which appeared in the **Cape Times**, Wednesday, August 17, 1994 gives a clear picture regarding the position of women within one of South Africa's most progressive mosques.

Death threats have been issued to the Imam of a Claremont mosque amid a controversy that has erupted after an American Muslim woman theologian broke tradition last week by delivering an address on the Friday sabbath.

The pre- prayer address on Fridays is normally delivered by a male, but last Friday visiting academic Dr Amina Wadud-Muhsin made history by becoming the first woman in South Africa to do so. The head of the mosque in Main Road, Claremont, Imam Rashied Omar, said last night he had been receiving death threats since Friday.

He said that Dr Wadud-Muhsin, an Islamic theologian teaching at Virginia University, had to abandon an address at the Gatesville Islamic Centre last Sunday night when about 300 men and women protesters disrupted it.

Yesterday, a new grouping named the Forum of Muslim Theologians, a body supported by members of the long-established Muslim Judicial Council (MJC)- including MJC president Sheikh Nazeem Mohamed - said in a statement they did not recognise Dr Wadud-Muhsin as a "bona fide authority of Islamic jurisprudence".

She was "part of the trend of so-called female liberation which started with women becoming priests in church, progressed to the Jewish faith and now surfaced in Islam".

"Innovations such as these taking place under the guise of Islam and in the name of progress are detrimental to Muslims," said the group.

Mr Omar said the forum's reaction was a "mass over-reaction on the part of a community not used to having their horizon's challenged".

He said the decision to invite Dr Wadud- Muhsin to the mosque was taken by the mosque's board and congregation "as part of our ethos to campaign for the freedom and improvement of the position of women in Islam".

4. Women in Hinduism

The Hindu scholar Alleyn Diesel (1992: 3) points out that Hinduism is unique among the world religions in its tradition of Goddess worship. In her historical overview of Hindu Goddesses she asserts that Goddesses feature minimally in early vedic literature. She argues that the Goddess of dawn, Usas, has twenty hymns in the Rig Veda but is not considered on par with important Gods such as Agni, Indra and Soma.

By 500 BCE-500 CE the Great Gods Vishnu and Shiva had female consorts, named Lakshmi and Uma/Parvati respectively.

And by the sixth century CE the Religion of the Goddess became a part of the written records.

The Goddess as female consort is further elevated in some Shiva traditions to that of Great Goddess who acts as Supreme being by the eighth century (Diesel, 1992: 3-4).

Diesel (1992:4) interestingly points out that India is unique in this reappearance of the Goddess in that the Goddess disappeared with the advent of Christianity in Mediterranean and European culture.

The Goddess's ability to appear in many forms is significant; as she may appear as nature, mother, beloved or as Supreme being. She points out that it is particularly as an independent deity, that the darker, fierce side of the Goddess is manifested and feared hence the proliferation of temples that are dedicated to the darker Goddesses (Diesel 1992:5).

Marglin (1985:42) observes that the Goddess who is represented alone or with the male in an inferior position is often the recipient of blood sacrifice, which is not the case when she is represented in an inferior role as consort to a male God.

She makes reference to Lawrence Babb who points to the couples Siva and Parvati, Vishnu and Lakshmi, and Rama and Sita who are considered exemplary social models.

Once these Goddesses stand alone, they become sinister, dangerous forces who need to be contained (ibid).

He further points out that when the Goddess resorts to her role as male consort, the dangerous, sinister force is transformed, and the role of tender wife emerges.

The negative theme about feminine, destructive, uncontainable power thus surfaces. Marglin (1985:43) contends that we are presented with a picture whereby female, inherently dangerous, power is transformed in the conjugal relationship by virtue of the restraining force of the male.

Diesel ascribes the seemingly fierce behaviour of, especially the Brahmanical Goddessess, as being a reflection of their mythology which tells of virtuous, faithful woman that are violently or unjustly treated by men, often through sexual assault. Such women subsequently express their outrage in destructive revenge and are then transformed into Goddessess. In both analysis of the Goddess in Hinduism, men's fear of feminine power surfaces. Women's bodies and the biological differences of woman are viewed as threatening by men since they cannot control or regulate it. Independent women are feared as they stand outside the authority of men. The following injunction in Manu encapsulates this sentiment:

By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house. In childhood a female must be subject

to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons: a woman must never be independent.

(Marglin, 1985: 43)

5. Women in Buddhism

Fools

Lust for women

Like dogs in heat

They do not know abstinence.

They are like flies

Who see vomited food.

Like a herd of hogs,

They greedily seek manure.

Women can ruin

The precepts of purity.

They can also ignore

Honour and virtue.

Causing one to go to hell

They prevent rebirth in heaven.

Why should the wise

Delight in them?...

If one listens

To what I have said

They can be reborn, separated

From women.

Then theirs will be

The majestically pure heaven

And they will attain

Supreme Enlightenment

Those who are not wise,

Act like animals,

Racing toward female forms

Like hogs toward mud.

Fools cannot see

The vice in desires

And ignorantly focus on them

Like blind men....

Because of their ignorance
 They are bewildered by women who,
 Like profit seekers in the market
 Deceive those who come near.

Foolish men close to desire
 Enter a realm of demons.
 Like maggots
 They are addicted to filth....

Ornaments on women
 Show off their beauty.
 But within them there is great evil
 As in the body there is air.

With a piece of bright silk
 One conceals a sharp knife.
 The ornaments on a woman
 Have a similar end.

The Tale of King Udayana of Vatsa [Collection of Jewels]

(Willis 1985:66- 67)

This opening abstract, once more, reflects the general misogyny in religion which failed to escape Buddhism.

Janice Willis (1985:61) contends that in India , as in early China, women led lives marked by a passage of three- fold subservience: firstly to their parents when young, then to their husbands when mature, and to their children when old.

The Buddha, she argues, acted rather radically when he permitted women into his religious order some five years after establishing the male order, sangha.

The first woman to become a Buddhist nun happened to be Mahaprajapati, the Buddha's aunt who had raised him from early childhood. Before her admission, the nun had to, however, accept eight regulations which were not to be transgressed.

Willis (1985:62- 63) sets out the translations of the eight rules as follows:

- (1) In the presence of monks, O Ananda, women are expected to request ordination to go forth as nuns. I announce this as the first important rule for women to overcome the obstructions so that instruction can be maintained throughout life.
- (2) In the presence of monks, O Ananda, a nun must seek the teaching and instructions every half month. I announce this as the second important rule....

- (3) No nun may spend a rainy season, O Ananda, in a place where no monks are resident. This, O Ananda, is the third important rule....
- (4) After the rainy season a nun must have both orders [monks and nuns] perform the "end of the rainy season" ceremony for her with reference to the seeing, hearing, or suspicion [of faults committed by her]. This is the fourth important rule....
- (5) It is forbidden that a nun, Ananda, accuse or warn a nun about transgression in morality, heretical views, conduct, or livelihood. It is not forbidden for a monk to accuse or warn a nun about morality, heretical views, conduct, or livelihood. This is the fifth important rule I announce....
- (6) A nun, Ananda, should not scold or be angry with or admonish a monk. I announce this as the sixth important rule for a woman....
- (7) When a nun violates important rules, O Ananda, penance must be performed every half month. This I declare as the seventh important rule....
- (8) A nun of one hundred years of age shall perform the correct duties to a monk. She shall, with her hands folded in prayerful attitude, rise to greet him and then bow down to him. This will be done with appropriate words of salutation. I declare this as the eighth important rule....

Ananda, incidently, was the Buddha's disciple who was a chief advocate for women and agitated for women to be admitted to the religious order.

Ursula King (1987:40) makes reference to the ancient Pali Canon which contains a

collection of 500 verses or songs by 71 Buddhist nuns who praised the Buddhist ideals of renunciation, perfection and the search for the ultimate goal of Nirvana. These songs are moreover considered to be expressions of the motives behind the pursuit of such a life.

She argues that the reasons for women becoming Buddhist nuns were not always religious but may have been social. Women who joined were often widowed, orphaned, without husband or were simply not willing to wait on men.

Even though becoming a Bhikkuni, a Buddhist nun, meant a certain liberation for women they were subject to the eight basic rules, which are set out above, while monks only had to follow four once they were ordained. The Bhikkuni, also had to observe 311 daily rules while the bhikku, the monk, only had 227 to observe (ibid). This, King argues, was yet another way of restricting women's freedom and reflected, moreover, the existing social inferiority of women.

6. Women in Rabbinic Judaism

The lot of women in Rabbinic Judaism does not seem any different to the apparent misogyny encountered in the other religious traditions discussed thus far.

- * Is this problem of viewing women as the "evil" other inherent to religion?
- * What do we make of the dichotomy in the sacred texts which dictates that all

of creation is good and worthy of salvation while a woman is depicted as the antithesis of that quest for salvation?

- * Are sacred texts inherently contradictory and unreliable or is the problem one of transmission?

Surely if these sacred texts are inspired by the Deity, the Supreme, Benevolent Being who created us in like image, things should look different for women too, who aspire to attain the ultimate form of salvation.

These are questions which I hope to fully address before the close of this section.

Judith Baskin (1985:4- 5) cites Leonard Swidler when she argues that women are at a severe disadvantage in all spheres of life, be it social, legal or religious.

Women's secondary status was entrenched by a rigidly defined patriarchal social order and by the perception that rabbinic legislation was divinely ordained.

Women were often excluded from religious observances and were consigned to the same category as children and slaves by being considered unacceptable witnesses. Rabbinic literature which usually promulgated negative imagery of women, more especially assertive women, taught that women possess four traits: "they are greedy, eavesdroppers, slothful and envious. They are also prone to steal and be frivolous" and "Wherever a woman does utter words of wisdom in a rabbinic story it is generally to deliver a rebuke to someone in need of chastisement. To be bested by a woman is punishment indeed" (Baskin 1985:6).

The historian Bernadette Brooten however assists us in answering some of the earlier questions asked. Based on archaeological findings pertaining to the period in question, she challenges previous scholarship and posits that women did in fact assume positions of leadership in the ancient synagogue. She exposes the androcentric scholarship and deliberate male bias for obscuring liberative texts about women.

Baskin (1985:10) therefor responds, by concluding

that in strictly confining woman to the sphere of the domestic the rabbis were not just sanctifying accepted traditions and norms of life. Theirs was a vision of an ideal society which they believed conformed to the divine will; their legislation enabled them to reject, in God's name, a number of aspects of the wider Jewish and gentile worlds around them, including female autonomy. The sharp dichotomy between men and women in rabbinic literature is a deliberate political and religious statement.

Culture was moreover strictly guarded as a male prerogative. Rabbi Eliezer, a first-century sage, is quoted as having said that " "If a man teaches his daughter Torah [Biblical teachings and their rabbinic interpretations] it is as though he taught her lechery.....The wisdom of woman is only in her distaff.....May the words of Torah be burned rather than be given to woman." " (Baskin 1985:10- 11).

Women's biological characteristics such as fertility, menstruation, and sex are furthermore proffered as reasons for women being feared and seen as threatening to men who cannot control or regulate these aspects of women. In turn they were defined as being dangerous, unclean and temptresses. Rabbinic Jews thus responded by having clearly delineated spaces to contain women in their attempts to regulate and sanctify society (Baskin 1985:14).

The plight of the Jewish woman is further portrayed by Ursula King (1987: 42) who quotes Rabbi Julia Neuberger as stating that:

One can only imagine what women must have felt on hearing their menfolk say in the morning service: 'Blessed art thou, O Lord, Our God, King of the Universe, who hast not made me a woman,' whilst they said 'Blessed art thou... who hast made me according to thy will'.

King (1987: 43) does however inform us that the struggle for the equality of women was taken up by Reform Judaism who drew on the Exodus motive and made the necessary parallels between Israelite enslavement and the position of women in Judaism.

Women are now slowly being allowed entry into the Rabbinic circles.

CONCLUSION

Women's exclusion from institutions of higher learning meant that they had very little or no access to sacred texts.

Jewish women were excluded from reading the Torah. This in turn ensured exemption from religious duties such as the studying and teaching of the Torah, the scrolls of Law (King 1987:42).

Muslim women, on the other hand, were allowed to read the Quran but were not allowed to preach it. Women were therefore at a distinct disadvantage to their privileged male counterparts, who had direct access to knowledge, and who were responsible for interpreting religious laws and for the setting up of religious, legal and social structures that enforced these patriarchal laws.

Theological thinking was thus exclusively done by men and reflected their experiences as such.

Decisions and rules were made for women who were absent from these vital formative processes, which were to dictate the direction societies were heading toward.

Women's own religious experiences and practices, often quite distinct from those of men, have been denied and played little part in the creation of canonical sacred literature and the commentatorial traditions on sacred texts, which has been so important for the development of religious and theological thought (King 1987: 36).

Now that women have become part of a culture of learning, it is imperative that they return to the primary sources that have so readily been used against them, in order to reclaim their dignity and self-worth which they share with the rest of humanity.

The silences that have been buried for so long need to be unearthed. The onus, however, lies with women to reclaim women's lost history, in order to become a visible, authentic voice that can claim divine sanctioning since women too, are created in the unblemishable likeness of God.

Fiorenza (1985: 133) refers to this recovery of sacred texts and traditions through a feminist historical reconstruction, as a hermeneutic of remembrance. She further claims that:

Rather than relinquish patriarchal biblical traditions, a hermeneutics of remembrance seeks to develop a feminist critical method and historical model for moving beyond the androcentric text to the history of women in biblical religion.

Such an interpretation recognizes methodologically that androcentric language as generic conventional language makes women invisible by subsuming us under linguistic masculine terms. It mentions women only when we are exceptional or cause problems.

Rosemary Radford Ruether (1985:112) extends the point that women have been excluded from shaping and interpreting the tradition, by not being able to bring their own experience into the public formulation of the tradition; by arguing that tradition has been shaped and interpreted against women, and that tradition has indeed been shaped to justify women's exclusion.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The point that religious pluralism is the main concept underlying a multi-cultural education in South Africa needs to be reaffirmed.

Religion Education and teaching about religious diversity is thus an essential element in a multi-cultural, pluralistic society.

Religion Education should celebrate the cultural and religious diversity of the South African peoples; a diversity which should be viewed as one of the many strengths of this society.

The motto "strength in diversity" should include categories such as differing faiths, races, cultures and gender.

The state therefore has to guarantee that religions co-exist equally and peacefully. Once civil grounds to create a space for all people to live together has been established, we would no longer need to theologise about religious pluralism.

A culture of civil toleration of diversity would ensure that exclusive claims to religion education can no longer be the prerogative of only one group.

An acceptable religion education furthermore needs to be descriptive and not prescriptive in its approach if it is to ascribe to sound educational tenets.

A pluralist ideal will by no means ensure an easy transition to a truly multi-religious/ multi-cultural situation, since the legacy of Apartheid still lingers and dictates our practices.

The desire to display or possess religious absolutes will by no means disappear at the embrace of pluralism.

A long road ahead awaits us all. A culture of tolerance and respect for diversity does, however, have to start now.

Education policy-makers therefore have to enter dialogue with all the respective religious groups:

Women, needless to say, will have to be represented in all these categories.

We agree that the classroom is a microcosm of the wider society. A feminist consciousness will therefore ensure a pedagogy which strives to break down imperialism and hierarchies that exist.

Social relations, and the way we view humanity has to change before a truly democratic education system can be established.

A feminist pedagogy can accelerate this process by not perpetuating the usual practices and social relations in the classroom.

To this end, a feminist pedagogy challenges oppressive educational practices.

Boneparth's (1980:25) list of aims for a womens studies course is useful in this regard. It entails:

- * Looking at new and old literature about women.
- * Raising new questions that are relevant to women.
- * Raising questions about the silence of traditional disciplines about women.
- * Raising questions about the male orientation and methodology of traditional fields.
- * Raising questions about sex- role relationships.
- * Questioning basic assumptions about society.

A most natural question to ask at this stage would be, where we should start. Like the proverbial chicken or the hen; it would be difficult to answer the question conclusively.

Do we start with teacher training or do we start with the pupil at school first. Should the curriculum be developed only partially at this stage or should we have a total revision throughout.

I know the frustration of having a teacher training which addresses the plurality, but a practical classroom situation which dictates differently. The present religious education syllabus entrenches Christian exclusivity and denies all other religion's authenticity.

Very little allowances are made for innovation as syllabus requirements should be adhered to, or it is assumed by the powers that be, that no effective teaching has taken place.

The situation does not lend itself to a very healthy or pleasant pedagogical scenario.

The only certainty we are faced with at this point is that extensive state funding has to occur in order to redress the imbalances.

Extensive in-service teacher training will enable teachers to implement new concepts and effective teaching methods. Christo Lombard (1991:9) recommends that teachers start using a new methodology on a relatively small scale, so as not to overburden or threaten teachers, while at the same time, serve to create growth opportunities for the experienced and well qualified teacher.

He proffers the following suggestions for such a methodology:

- * The teacher implements this curriculum in the manner in which he/she finds least threatening.
- * The teacher accepts a facilitating role rather than a "preaching" role.
- * The teacher learns to feel comfortable in a role of co-enquirer rather than that of expert.
- * The teacher learns to accept the support system as growth opportunity towards greater personal freedom and creativity and not bureaucratic control under a new name.
- * The teacher enlarges his/her scope in the field of new methodologies such as group activities, case studies and multi-disciplinary work.

- * The teacher develops new evaluational skills through paying attention to the effective and psych-motor evaluational domains, and in implementing new types of evaluation such as teacher/learners contracting and peer group evaluation.
- * The teacher develops new skills in differentiation and socialisation, not only based on measured intellectual ability, but also on factors such as interest, need and concern as well as age, life experience, environment and areas of need, for remedial work or enrichment.
- * The teacher plays an effective part in the evaluation of this curriculum and develops curricular skills in the process.
- * Teachers and learners become skilled in exercising sensitivity so as not to violate the conscience of others or to withdraw from the discussion.

In closing then, once we have questioned the omissions in the religion education syllabus, we need to continue with the process of praxis whereby we continually, critically, reflect on our practices.

Addressing the issue of women in religion would not simply mean adding women as yet another theme in the religion education syllabus (King 1989: 99).

It will in fact require new perspectives and raise new questions about the fact that Christian men's experiences have been treated as normative.

All those who have been marginalized thus far should have their muted voices restored if we are serious about addressing the imbalances in society. Religion education is one way in which we can realize this ideal as it involves so much more than merely transmitting information.

King (ibid) makes a fitting closing remark that the dialogical approach is not only needed among religions but that it is also needed between men and women if we desire to transcend an exclusive, patriarchal stance.

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